

ANALYSIS
OF
THE DENE LANGUAGE
INFORMATION
REVIEW



Summary Report

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THE DENE LANGUAGE
INFORMATION
REVIEW



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
YELLOWKNIFE, N.W.T.

Summary Report

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1

Why the Study Was Done

The people of the Government of the Northwest Territories' Department of Information in Yellowknife wanted the Dene Language and Information Review to answer two main questions:

“What do Dene people in N.W.T. communities want to know about the Territorial Government?” and, “What are the best ways the Department’s people can tell those things to Dene people, so they will be heard and understood?”.

As well, they wanted to begin gathering some facts about Dene people’s use of the different Dene languages and English.

They believe that the answers to these questions will help the Department of Information’s Dene language interpreter-communicators do a better job of giving government information to Dene people and informing Government about what Dene people want and need.

2

How the Study Was Done

People from the Department of Information and from the Department of Executive's Bureau of Statistics first put together 29 questions they thought would help answer the main questions.

The Dene interpreter-communicators helped them find the right words, so the questions could be easily understood or be easily interpreted into Dene languages.

Not everyone in every Dene community in the N.W.T. could be asked to answer the survey questions. That would have taken either a very long time or more money and people than the Department of Information had to do the job.

It is possible, though, to get a good idea of what answers most people would give, by asking only some people, if the people asked are chosen by chance.

So the Bureau of Statistics employees used a computer to pick some houses in the 11 communities the Dene interpreter-communicators personally knew best, being careful that the houses chosen for each community were spread out over the whole community.

They also tried to choose enough houses so that there would be young people and old people, men and women, in about the same proportions as they were in the community as a whole. They knew that people in the 11 communities, among them, spoke all the different Dene languages.

The eight Dene interpreter-communicators were trained to ask the survey questions and

tested them out in Yellowknife before going to the other communities.

Then the interpreters went out and tried to contact all the Dene people over 15 years of age who lived in the chosen houses in: Fort Good Hope, Snowdrift, Rainbow Valley (Yellowknife), Detah, Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, Rae, Edzo, Aklavik, Fort McPherson and Fort Providence. This took several weeks during the spring of 1983.

They tried to reach 554 people, and actually succeeded in asking 301 people all the survey questions. Asking that many people questions is a hard job, but we believe that the Dene interpreter/communicators did it as well or better than other people who have done studies of this kind in the N.W.T.

When they came back, the interpreters entered all the answers they'd got into the Bureau of Statistics' computer.

Because more people were reached in some communities, in comparison to the number of people who lived there, than in others, the total answers were fixed to reflect each community's part of the total number of people in all 11 communities.

Overall, more women and older people answered the survey questions. You should keep this in mind when you are reading about what the survey found out, because it is possible that people would give different answers depending on the age and sex.

3

What the Study Discovered

Standing of the Dene Languages and English in the Survey Communities

The answers to the Dene Language and Information Review show that the Dene languages are well used in the survey communities, except for Loucheux and maybe North Slavey in Fort Good Hope.

Eight out of every ten people questioned said they had good understanding of their Dene language, and nearly as many said they could also speak it well. While most people said they cannot read their Dene language at all, about one out of every four people questioned said they could read it at least a little bit. More people said they like to speak their Dene language than said they like to use English or than said they like to speak both languages.

Young people, especially those who were less than 25 years old, and Loucheux people, were less likely to say they could understand or speak their Dene language well, and more of them preferred to speak English. North Slavey people in Fort Good Hope said they could understand North Slavey, but fewer of them said they could speak it well and half of them prefer to speak English.

About six out of every ten people questioned also said they could understand and speak English well, and about half of all the people questioned said they could read it well. But some people did say they cannot understand, speak or, especially, read English at all. Dogrib people in particular said they had less knowledge of English than

other Dene groups. More women and young people said their English was good.

The most common suggestion people had for preserving the Dene languages and culture was to teach them in the schools.

Teaching them at home, setting an example or learning by living in traditional ways and using your language whenever you can were other popular suggestions, especially among older people.

What Information is Needed from the Government

From this survey, it looks like the main thing most Dene people in these communities need to know from the government is, what kind of information the government can give them and where to go to get it.

Most people said they did not now get enough government information (more than eight out of every ten people questioned).

Nearly half said they didn't get any information at all about the government now.

Many people — about one out of every five questioned — said they did not know where they could go to get information or help with problems and questions about the government.

A lot of people did not know what kind of information to ask for, either. It looks as if they did not know what information the government has that might be useful to them. So it's not surprising that most of the people who did ask for different kinds of government information wanted to know some fairly basic facts.

The kind of information that was asked for most was information about government departments — how they're set up, what they do and especially what programs or activities they have that affect the Dene or that might be used by Dene people in the communities.

A lot of people also asked for general information about the Territorial Government as a whole. Young people and elders, who seemed to have the least information of anyone, most often asked for this kind of information.

Some people asked for information particularly about jobs and education, among the more specific requests. Young people were most likely to ask for this kind of information.

How the Government Can Communicate the Information

One thing the answers to the survey certainly showed was the Dene people in the communities almost all listened to the radio to get news and information. About half also use newspapers, and many people, especially old people, still get the news by word of mouth. Television seems to be getting more popular among young people.

People most often suggested that the Territorial Government could improve its communication with Dene people in their area by using the radio more. A lot of them said they would personally prefer to get information about the government that way, too.

The results suggest that the best way for the government to inform Dene people in the communities, at least about such basic things as what information is available and where people can go to get it, is to use the radio.

More people said they would like to get government information in English than said they would like it in their Dene language or than wanted it in both languages. Here, however, most people probably thought the question meant printed information.

Most people said they went to government offices or employees if they wanted to know about government programs. Some people, men especially, also went to their Dene band office or officials. People gave different answers, of course, depending on what offices there were in their community and how they felt about them.

From the answers to the survey, there seems to be someone in the local settlement or municipal office in most communities who can give people information in their native language. But, in a lot of cases, people said that that person could not give them the kind of information they needed.

Very few people said they found government information they had seen so far easy to understand or read. So most people suggested trying to keep government information simple as the best way to make it easy to understand. Quite a few people, especially Dogrib people, also suggested that translation or interpretation would help.

From these answers, it looks like the best all-round way for the Territorial Government to communicate information to Dene people in communities, at least some of the longer and more complicated types of things people wanted to know about, is to:

Put together some audio-visual shows, in simple English and Dene languages, to be shown in community G.N.W.T. offices, with maybe some cassette tapes or printed materials for people to take home.

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